

Testimony of Paul Gaudio, M.D.
In Opposition to
HB7159 – AN ACT UPDATING THE SCOPE OF PRACTICE OF OPTOMETRY

March 5, 2007

Good afternoon, Senator Handley, Rep. Sayers, Rep. and other distinguished members of this committee. For the record my name is Paul Gaudio, I am a board certified ophthalmologist with fellowship training in iritis. I am here to strongly oppose HB 7159, An Act Updating the Scope of Practice of Optometry.

I would like to take a moment and talk about iritis and the severe complications and systemic diseases which can be affiliated with this eye disease.

First and foremost iritis is a systemic disease. Iritis is inflammation of the "iris". The "iris" is the colored part of the eye, blue in some people, brown in others. "Inflammation" is when the immune system exerting its destructive effect on tissue. Since the immune system is composed of cells that circulate around the body, inflammation in the eye very frequently reflects inflammation in the entire body. Since the eye structures are easily visible and very sensitive, many inflammatory conditions first become evident in the eye. Examples of diseases that present with iritis frequently include juvenile rheumatoid arthritis (affecting children), and sarcoidosis (affecting all ages, black people more than white). The evaluation and treatment of thus iritis requires a sound knowledge of and comfort with systemic diseases.

Iritis is unforgiving; inflammation in the eye creates irreparable damage to the ocular tissues. Inflammation causes swelling of the nerves responsible for vision, and swollen nerves do not see. This swelling can be very difficult to treat, and even then often with limited success. Inflammation also causes glaucoma, which is nerve damage due to elevated pressure in the eye. The eye has tissue that normally drains the intraocular fluid, and this tissue can be damaged by inflammation. The result is an inability to drain fluid. This scarring can not be undone. Because iritis is such a destructive process, practitioners who treat it have very little room for error, and delay in optimal therapy can result in irreversible visual loss.

I believe strongly that the passage of HB 7159 would put the residents of Connecticut at risk and that Connecticut would better be served with the current statute of requiring optometrist to refer this systemic disease to an ophthalmologist who is uniquely trained in the treatment of systemic disease and surgery.

Thank you for your time and I appreciate your consideration of my testimony.



